

The seventeenth meeting of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) for the academic year 2022–2023 was called to order by Professor Call, chair of the committee, in the president’s office on Monday, April 3, at 4:00 p.m. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Hasan, Martini, Mattiacci, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Elliott said that he has learned that a number of other colleges plan to announce changes to their COVID-19 policies that are consistent with those that he had discussed with the committee last week. He noted that Amherst’s policy changes would be announced soon ([see the email to the community of April 12, 2023](#)). The president also commented that the senior leadership team is considering proposals for budget reductions that have been brought forward. Tom Dwyer, associate chief financial officer; Provost Epstein; and Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer, will be meeting with the Committee on Priorities and Resources this week to discuss the budget, he noted. Concluding his remarks, President Elliott expressed enthusiasm for the visit of Presidential Scholar Saidiya Hartman; her recent keynote address was a well-attended event, he noted.

Provost Epstein next provided some information as a follow-up to the April 4 faculty meeting. She noted that, rather than coming from endowed funds, funding for assistant football coach positions is raised by Head Coach E.J. Mills each year. On the topic of the college’s bias-reporting system, a question about which was raised at the faculty meeting, Provost Epstein said that she understands that Laurie Frankl, director of civil rights and Title IX coordinator, plans to share a report with data for this academic year before the start of 2023–2024.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Polk expressed some concern about a possible lack of disciplinary spread on next year’s FEC, given the fields of the candidates on the ballot for the near-final round of the ongoing election (two newly elected tenure-track members of the committee are in STEM fields, as is Professor Call). Professor Polk noted that the provost had suggested earlier that the committee’s work would benefit from having another tenured member, and he wondered if this recommendation should be implemented. Provost Epstein responded that, while in her view, it might be a good idea to add another tenured member to the FEC, this would have to be considered by the committee and approved by the faculty, as the change would represent a revision of the voted FEC charge. In addition, she feels that it might be best to have the committee continue for a bit longer with its current structure, which is still relatively new, before making any changes, she said. Provost Epstein shared that she has confidence that the faculty will take into account the field of the faculty member who will fill the remaining slot on the committee.

Continuing the conversation about the election process for the FEC, Professors Polk and Hasan both reported having been told that some departments would prefer that colleagues in their department not serve on the FEC, due to the course release that would mean that the department would be down a course. Some concern was raised that some tenure-track faculty might feel pressure to take their names off the ballot as a consequence. In regard to tenure-track faculty, the provost explained that there were twenty-three names on the tenure-track ballot for the FEC. Seventeen tenure-track faculty asked not to be included on the ballot, and another twenty-one were not included because they will be on leave for one or both semesters next year, or due to other stated eligibility criteria. The committee said that it would be informative to share this information with the faculty via these minutes and to have a discussion of this issue before the FEC pilot concludes.

Continuing with questions, Professor Mattiacci, noting that her department had just completed training around active shootings, asked if plans call for the new student center to have bullet-proof glass. The science center does not have bullet-proof glass, she noted. President Elliott responded that issues of

security are being considered as part of the project (the architecture firm of Herzog & de Meuron, which is designing the building, is certainly conscious of security-related issues), but that there needs to be a balance between these concerns and the desire to create a welcoming and inviting building that is open to the outside and has beautiful views of the landscape. On another security note, the committee discussed the recent very disturbing trend called “Swatting,” in which a fictitious report of an emergency is made to the police or posted on social media, which causes fear and throws institutions into chaos. Just recently, Middlebury College was put on lockdown after a report of an active shooter at the library on campus that was later deemed not to be a credible threat. In another recent incident, Harvard students of color were awakened by armed officers in their rooms after a fake 911 call about a person with a “gun threatening violence” brought the police to the residence hall searching for the risk.

Returning to the topic of the student center, President Elliott noted that the design for the building is largely completed, with design work on interior spaces and finishes still under way. Professor Mattiacci asked about which individuals at the college are coordinating this project. The president said that Tom Davies, executive director of planning, design, and construction is playing a central role in this work, and that M. Thomas will also now be involved. President Elliott said that, in addition, he is meeting with the architects, at times, and is fully briefed about planning and the progress of the project. Professor Martini noted that the faculty was more involved in the planning of the science center, as was appropriate since it is a purely academic building.

Professor Martini, noting the ongoing inflationary environment and its disproportionate impact on those at lower salary levels, and in the interest of offsetting this to some degree, suggested that everyone at the college receive the same flat amount as a raise for this year, rather than basing annual increases on a set percentage of individuals’ salaries (the current model). Under the recent approach, in which faculty generally receive the same percentage increase, those who earn more receive higher absolute increases. The committee agreed that some members of the community would likely not support Professor Martini’s suggestion and would not see it as equitable necessarily.

Turning to another issue related to compensation, Provost Epstein informed the members that a number of faculty have been expressing interest in the college adopting a merit-pay system for faculty. She is aware that some institutions that have merit pay are thinking of returning to a system such as Amherst’s, which largely does not consider merit when awarding salary increases, while others are thinking of moving to a merit-pay system. In her view, there is no system that will be seen as fair to everyone. Clearly, there are pluses and minuses to all compensation systems, she noted. The provost said that she imagines that the issue of merit pay, as a matter of principle, will be brought to the FEC, though it is not within the faculty’s purview to determine its level of compensation.

Conversation turned to the faculty meeting discussion of the FEC’s proposal to change the time of faculty meetings to Friday at 3:00 p.m. The members discussed the issues that had been raised, which included concern about how to ensure that the small number of faculty who teach classes and labs at that time would be able to attend faculty meetings. The committee expressed the view that some solutions could be found—for example, having faculty leave recorded lessons, having another faculty member who can’t attend faculty meetings substitute for the instructor, having a speaker on the day of the faculty meeting, and/or rearranging the schedule for departmental offerings. Under the proposal, the dates of faculty meetings would be known well ahead of the meetings, so that planning could take place and be communicated to students at the start of the semester. Noting the suggestion that had been made at the faculty meeting that the proposal be adopted as a three-year pilot, if it is approved, the committee agreed that this would be a good idea. The members also discussed the view that had been

shared that the proposal, if adopted, be implemented in the spring of 2024, rather than in the fall of 2023, as the committee had imagined—since the fall teaching schedule has already been set. Some members felt that it would be best not to delay the implementation of the new time, should it be approved, since the obstacles to addressing the concerns that had been raised did not seem insurmountable. Others supported the idea of implementing the new time in the spring, for the reason that had been shared at the faculty meeting.

Continuing the discussion, the members agreed that it will be important to offer support to those departments/individual faculty who view a transition to this time as a major issue. The provost agreed to determine, with the help of the registrar, which faculty are teaching at times that would intersect with faculty meetings, if they are held on Fridays at 3:00 p.m. (The provost did so after the meeting and found that some faculty members would face significant challenges if the meeting time changed in the fall. In response, the members decided to propose that the new time be adopted in spring 2024. The motion in these minutes and the committee's votes reflect that decision, which was made over email.)

Professor Hasan commented that a number of mid-career faculty members who are highly engaged scholars had shared concerns with him about the proposal to hold faculty meetings on Fridays, noting that some Fridays are already taken up with chairs' meetings. In their view, having more meetings on Fridays would present an obstacle to their scholarly activities, including the ability to travel to conferences. In addition, some fear that a switch to Friday faculty meetings will ultimately lead to Fridays also being reserved for a community hour, a scenario that they do not favor. Provost Epstein responded that chairs' meetings take place roughly twice a semester. At present, only about half of all faculty members attend the evening meetings. She suspects that daytime meetings would not generate a lower attendance rate and may increase attendance, she said. It was noted that several colleagues had commented that, at the recent faculty meeting, many more early-career faculty had spoken than is typical, which was seen as a positive development. Clearly, many faculty members are passionate about this issue and want to have a vote sooner rather than later, the members agreed.

The committee then discussed whether, to facilitate further discussion and the vote on the meeting time proposal at the May 2 faculty meeting, the meeting should be in person or on Zoom, and whether electronic voting should be permitted for those who do not attend the meeting. After some conversation, it was agreed that, as is always true, those with an interest in the motion and a desire to vote should attend the meeting in person. All voting, the members decided, would take place during the meeting, with no electronic option. Further, the members decided, the meeting will be devoted almost entirely to the proposal to change the time of faculty meetings to Friday at 3 p.m. and to set the dates of the meetings in the summer before the next academic year. Given the topic and the hour, the members decided that colleagues who would find it helpful to bring their dependents to the meeting would be welcome to do so. In addition, anyone who wishes to leave the meeting right after the vote on the proposal, which will be the first agenda item, should feel free to do so. The committee also agreed to encourage those who may have an amendment to the faculty meeting motion to forward it to committee, in advance of the meeting, if they wish.

Motion

That the faculty approve the following proposal from the Faculty Executive Committee as a three-year pilot, beginning in the spring of 2024.

That, normally, during the academic year, there be six regular faculty meetings that take place in October, November, December, February, March, and April on Fridays at 3:00 p.m.;

That one meeting (known as the “convocation meeting”) be held before classes start at the beginning of the academic year, and that another meeting (known as the “commencement meeting”) be held leading up to commencement;

That faculty meeting dates for each academic year be set in the summer before the next academic year;

That faculty meetings usually take place in Cole Assembly Room in Converse Hall, though they may take place in other venues, as circumstances dictate.

If the proposal is approved, the language shown in red below will replace the current language in the [Faculty Handbook \(IV., R., 3.\)](#), which is shown here with strike-outs; the faculty will evaluate the pilot and decide whether to make these changes permanent in the fall of 2026.

3. ~~Regular~~ Faculty Meetings

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~~During the academic year the faculty holds at least three stated meetings that normally take place in Cole Assembly Room in Converse Hall: one at the opening of college, one before spring vacation for the approval of new courses or changes in courses for the coming college year, and a meeting immediately before commencement.~~

~~The meetings at the opening of college and before commencement are normally held in the morning. Other faculty meetings are normally held on Tuesday evenings at 7:30. The first and third Tuesday evenings of months when the college is in session are reserved for meetings of the faculty.~~

The members next discussed [a note from Professor Hanneke](#) in which he proposed some possible changes to the format of faculty meetings. While finding some of these ideas compelling, the committee agreed to focus its efforts on changing the time of faculty meetings as a first step. The members decided to return to other issues related to faculty meetings at a future date.

Conversation turned briefly to the FEC’s meeting with a small number of tenure-track faculty members on March 27. This meeting represents a continuation of the Committee of Six’s practice of inviting all tenure-track faculty to meet with the committee on an annual basis. (The president and provost also meet with all tenure-track faculty each year.) [A summary of the discussion is available here](#). Professor Call noted that the faculty would have appreciated having more notice about the meeting, in order to plan their schedules. In regard to the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty, one of the topics of discussion at the meeting, the members decided that it is best not to take any action about the future of the group, which is currently dormant. Provost Epstein noted the suggestion that visitors and lecturers should be represented by this group, an idea that she does not feel is appropriate, given the very different structure and needs of those who occupy these positions, which have contracts that include terms.

Anticipating the agenda for the committee's next meeting, the members ask the provost to invite Kristina Reardon, director of the intensive writing program and lecturer in English, to speak with the committee about the intensive writing program on April 24. In particular, the members said that they are curious about whether first-year seminar instructors are recommending students for intensive writing classes, and if the students who are recommended are actually signing up for the classes. In addition, the committee noted its interest in K. Reardon's sense of whether the students who would benefit from intensive writing classes are actually getting the instruction they need.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein

Provost and Dean of the Faculty